



POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL EUTHANASIA OF ANIMALS

BACKGROUND

The word “euthanasia” means the intentional causing of a painless and merciful death. Animal sheltering agencies have a mandate to provide a humane death for those animals whose lives must be ended. These include animals that are fractious to people or animals, or animals that are suffering from or afflicted with a medical condition that cannot be remedied with reasonable efforts, and animals whose owners request euthanasia for the above reasons.

The Escondido Humane Society is committed to preventing the euthanasia of healthy animals, as well as those animals where reasonable medical treatment or behavior modification will enable them to become healthy, socialized pets. It is the policy of the Escondido Humane Society that no healthy or treatable animal should be euthanized if it can be adopted into a suitable home. Our commitment to responsible sheltering practices requires that we use and document reasonable efforts to place adoptable or treatable animals in an adoptive home or with an adoption organization.

DEFINITIONS

Defining what we mean is an essential part of creating an effective work plan. To be meaningful, definitions must be objective and based solely on an animal’s health and behavior, and not other criteria such as age, color, and length of stay at the shelter, number of similar animals at the shelter or housing space.

By properly documenting the assessment of each animal and accurately categorizing those that are euthanized, the Escondido Humane Society can provide the public with more complete and accurate information on the disposition of impounded animals, and report euthanasia statistics in context. The Escondido Humane Society uses the San Diego Animal Welfare Coalition Treatment Matrix to categorize animals which is Appendix A of this policy.

Animals are assessed for adoption based on the following criteria:

Healthy animals are those animals eight (8) weeks of age or older (or, for the purposes of this policy, weaned and eating on their own) at, or subsequent to, the time the animal is taken into possession, have manifested no signs of a behavioral, or temperamental defect that could pose a health or safety risk or otherwise make the animal unsuitable for placement as a pet, and have manifested no sign of disease, injury, congenital or

hereditary condition that affects the health of the animal, or that is likely to affect the animal's health in the future.

“Healthy” animals are healthy and well socialized. They are not dangerous and do not pose a risk of harm to people or animals. Animals that may be old, deaf, blind, scarred, or disabled, but are not in any pain, do not require medical treatment or behavior modification, and are friendly pets, are considered healthy.

Treatable animals shall include any animal that is not deemed healthy but could become adoptable with “reasonable efforts.” “Treatable” animals have a manageable behavioral defect and/or medical condition that is typically responsive to reasonable behavior modification or medical treatment that would enable them to become healthy, socialized pets.

To be considered “treatable,” an animal need not be fully rehabilitated within the applicable holding period. It is the reasonableness of the behavior modification or medical treatment and the likelihood of remediation, rather than the cost or availability of such resources in the shelter environment that is determinative. Reasonable procedures are generally considered the accepted, prevailing, usual and customary remedial measure for the particular condition among veterinarians or behaviorists (as distinguished from unconventional, untried, or experimental procedures).

While cost and availability may be relevant in deciding whether or not an animal should be treated or euthanized, they are not material factors in determining whether an animal is defined as treatable or non-rehabilitatable. Although saving treatable animals will be limited by budget constraints, such financial considerations do not affect the definition of “treatable.” The decision as to whether an animal is “treatable” depends primarily on the condition of the animal rather than other criteria unrelated to the animal's needs.

Treatable is not synonymous with savable. An animal with a remote chance for recovery, or whose condition would require experimental procedures with uncertain outcomes may be savable, but it is not reasonably “treatable.”

Behavior-Treatable are animals with some manageable behavioral defect that is typically responsive to reasonable behavior modification that would enable them to become socialized pets. Behaviorally treatable animals will not be euthanized. Exceptions may be made in cases where the treatment needed by the animal is not readily available or affordable, or has been ineffective, and the animal's condition or quality of life has deteriorated to an unacceptable level.

Animals that exhibit severe distress in the shelter environment may be candidates for euthanasia. This may take the form of not eating, self mutilation such as lick granulomas, constant vocalization, pacing, or cage spinning, elimination problems, depression, etc. Efforts to improve their environment to provide relief should be attempted and documented. Outside placement of these animals through foster homes or rescue groups also should be attempted and documented. If we cannot find a way to make the animal

more at ease, or the animal has deteriorated so rapidly that outside placement is not possible within a reasonable timeframe of 24-48 hours, euthanasia may be the only option to provide humane care and avoid lessening the animal's quality of life.

“Safety” factors focus on the risk of injury to the animal, other animals, staff members/volunteers, a prospective adopter or family, and members of the general public. Assessment is based primarily on the animal's responsiveness to training, the degree of potential harm, and the likelihood of eventual placement in a responsible, knowledgeable home. The overriding consideration is whether this animal poses an unreasonable risk of harm to people or animals even if housed and cared for in a responsible manner.

With any treatable behavior condition, the Veterinarian or Behaviorist and the Director of Operations or their designee shall ensure that the animal receives the appropriate training, provided that resources are available through reasonable efforts. In cases where the animal has been removed from the shelter for such training, the animal will be re-assessed by the Behaviorist and either the Veterinarian or the Director of Operations (or their designee) before re-entry to the adoption program.

Behavior-Non-Treatable are feral animals, or other animals observed to be dangerous or fractious to people or other animals. Animals that at any time subsequent to impoundment have exhibited threatening behavior towards a person or another animal, or have inflicted injury to a person or another animal through biting or severe scratching may be candidates for euthanasia. Each incident should be promptly reviewed and assessed on a case-by-case basis by the Behaviorist, Veterinarian, Director of Operations, or their designee.

Such animals whose behavior is considered an isolated incident (protecting its litter, response to threatening behavior initiated by another animal, uncertain reaction by young animal to frightening situation, inadvertent contact during play, puppy bites, etc.) may be made or remain available for adoption with supervisory concurrence immediately following any required quarantine period. Such animals should be subject to increased observation. Any animal determined to pose an unreasonable risk of harm to people or animals may be euthanized.

NOTE: Aggressive behavior displayed by a dog or cat while in its enclosure, towards another animal (inside or outside of the enclosure) may not be a fair indication of its behavior or suitability for adoption. Since the same animal may (or may not) interact satisfactorily with other animals when out of its enclosure, an animal's behavior needs to be assessed after it is removed from its enclosure.

Any animal requiring on-going, extreme safety precautions such as muzzling in public, the need for avoidance of everyday situations or lifetime behavior modification medication to ensure safety, do not meet the criteria for treatable and are potential candidates for euthanasia.

Animals that cannot tolerate normal handling or kennel housing procedures, demonstrated by extreme fearfulness or extremely rough or inappropriate responses, requiring more accommodation than is reasonable, are considered “Behavior-Non-treatable.” Reasonable accommodations include but are not limited to slower handling, use of treats or other motivations, removal from kennel for cleaning procedures, changing location for handling procedures, environmental enrichment, limited muzzling for medical procedures, etc.

A recommendation for euthanasia may be generated by a concern that the animal poses an unmanageable or unreasonable threat to staff, public safety, or to other animals, or by concern for the quality of life an animal is likely to achieve when available behavior modifications do not lessen the exhibition of severe distress. In these cases, euthanasia is the only reasonable option to ensure safety and to avoid lowering the animal’s quality of life.

Medical-Treatable animals have some manageable medical condition that is typically responsive to reasonable medical treatment that would enable them to become healthy pets. These animals will not be euthanized. Exceptions are made if the treatment is not readily available through reasonable effort or has become ineffective, and the animal’s condition or quality of life has deteriorated to an unacceptable level.

Medical-Treatable animals may be classified into one of four medical intervention/treatment levels. To help visualize these levels, consider a pyramid divided in four sections or groups. The base or first level is the largest category of treatable animals and represents uncomplicated, basic medical treatments. As treatments (or interventions) become more complicated, intense, or chronic, there is an elevation in the intervention level and a narrower, smaller group of animals are represented.

The Veterinarian will use the guidelines listed below in determining the appropriate treatment/intervention level for animals with a treatable medical condition. Treatment parameters are described by type, intensity, number and/or duration of treatments, as well as route of administration, number, frequency, and duration of medications. (See further discussion of treatable medical conditions in Appendix A of this policy.)

Unhealthy-Untreatable are animals that are irremediably suffering from a serious illness or severe injuries, animal with a poor prognosis or protracted painful recovery, or animals that are suffering from or afflicted with some medical condition that is not likely to be remedied with reasonable efforts. Animals that are irremediably suffering from a serious illness or severe injury may be euthanized to alleviate unnecessary suffering without being held for owner redemption or adoption. As a general rule, the veterinarian or Director of Animal Care should recommend euthanasia for medical reasons.

In cases involving medical emergencies and/or the need to alleviate severe suffering, an Escondido Humane Society Veterinarian, if available, or Director of Operations should be contacted (by telephone or through dispatch, if necessary) to determine if the animal should be transported for off-site treatment or euthanized.

Examples of conditions that may necessitate euthanasia include: fading/collapsing kittens, organ failure, feline immunodeficiency, chronic debilitation, certain congenital abnormalities or defects, or any serious, chronic illness with a poor prognosis or not reasonably responsive to treatment. A condition that may not necessitate euthanasia on its own, when present in combination with other factors may lead to the decision to euthanize. Quality of life and risk to the health of other animals or people will be considered in the decision.

Neonatal animals are newborns unable to survive without maternal care. These animals may be euthanized without being held for owner redemption or adoption if no maternal, foster or rescue care can be given. Attempts to obtain foster or rescue care will be documented and the unweaned animal(s) held as long as they are not under distress or their stability compromised.

Owner Request Owners may sign a written request for a “fee for service” euthanasia of their animal(s) and, in general, such animals may be immediately euthanized. Such requests that involve questionable circumstances, an inadequate reason, or a healthy or treatable animal, should be brought to the attention of an Animal Control Supervisor for review. Healthy animals will not be euthanized at an owner’s request.

Reasonable efforts are documented attempts by the Escondido Humane Society throughout an animals’ stay in treating or placing an adoptable or behavioral/medical treatable animal. These include documentation of contacting other shelters or rescue groups, and efforts by staff or volunteers to modify animal behavior. If all efforts fail the animal is euthanized as Behavior-Non-Treatable.

Intake

Each animal admitted to the shelter will have a medical examination by a Medical Staff or the Veterinarian upon entry or at the earliest convenience. Staff is expected to document any notable behavior or medical condition and treatment of each animal while at the shelter. Behavior tests may be conducted approaching an animal’s Hold Date or in some cases after the hold date has passed. Stray animals are held for a full 5 days after intake to allow owners to reclaim their pets. Owner surrendered animals are held for a full 3 days after intake to allow them to reclaim their pets.

Animals that are irremediably suffering or newborns requiring maternal care may be euthanized without being held for owner redemption or adoption and feral cats may be euthanized after 72 hours with proper observation documentation. Such animals may be euthanized with the approval of the staff Veterinarian, if available, or the Director of Animal Care.

Consensus/Concurrence

Before considering euthanasia, reasonable efforts are required for all adoptable, behavior-treatable, and medical-treatable animals. Reasonable efforts and documentation should, at a minimum, include:

- Behavior modification (of treatable – behavior animals) is attempted (provided that resources are available with reasonable efforts) and such attempts or efforts have been documented in an Animal Memo.
- Any medical condition, intervention level (if applicable), and any treatment, is documented on the Medical Treatment Screen.
- If Applicable, make contact with one or more rescue groups and one or more other sheltering agencies.

Prior to euthanasia of treatable or non-treatable animals, the documented concurrence of four Directors is required on the cage card. In the event that less than four Directors are available onsite, and the animal is suffering, verbal discussion regarding each animal can be done, with a verbal approval documented on the animal's cage card.

Mediation

If consensus is not reached, all documentation is reviewed by and opinions are discussed with the Veterinarian, the Behaviorist, the Director of Animal Care, and the Director of Operations. If after careful re-evaluation, consensus is still not reached or all individuals cannot meet agreement on pursuing additional steps to avoid euthanasia, the documentation will be presented to and reviewed by the Executive Director of the Humane Society. The Executive Director's decision is binding, and should be reflected in an Animal Memo. Each level of review should take place within a reasonable period of time and should be expedited if it is in the best interests of the animal.

APPENDIX A

Current San Diego Animal Welfare Coalition Treatment Matrix